

Cellphone Vote-Buying

Michael I. Shamos

Oct. 5, 2005

Taxonomy: retail, vote-buying

Applicability: all DRE systems

Method:

Many cellphone have cameras that can transmit real-time video. This allows a voter to record and/or transmit what transpires in the voting booth to a confederate who will pay him if he votes a certain way.

Resource requirements: A cellphone and cash to reward the compliant voter.

Potential gain:

As large as with any vote-buying scheme.

Likelihood of detection:

Dependent on the extent of privacy curtains. In the old lever machine booths the method would work perfectly because the voter was fully enclosed. With some DREs there is very little privacy structure surrounding the booth, and detection would be easy.

Countermeasures:

Preventative measures:

Statutory. Bringing camera phones into polling places is illegal in Singapore and a statute is under consideration in Italy. I have no found any U.S. state that forbids camera phones in polling places, although vote-buying is universally illegal in the U.S.

Jam cellphone frequencies in polling places. Currently illegal – would require federal regulations.

Detection measures:

Watch the voters carefully, where possible. Set up detectors to detect cellphone use in the polling place.

Citations:

The problem is not theoretical. Actual incidents of cellphone vote-buying have been reported in at least Hong Kong, Singapore and

Thailand. However, several writers claim that bringing cellphones into polling places can help reduce the incidence of corrupt practices, e.g. http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/pdf/briefing_papers/Africa%20BP02.pdf, http://www.wirelessmoment.com/legal_issues_camera_phones/